

What You Should Know About Melanoma

Melanoma is a type of skin cancer. It only accounts for about 10-20 percent of all skin cancers but results in approximately 90 percent of all skin cancer-related deaths. More than 60,000 people are diagnosed with melanoma in the United States annually.

Where does melanoma usually appear?

Melanoma can appear anywhere on the skin surface. In men, it is most common on the back or the head and neck, and in women, on the back or the back of the legs. Melanoma can develop in a pre-existing mole, or arise on normal-appearing skin.

What are the signs and symptoms of melanoma?

Melanoma can often be recognized by its appearance. The ABCDE rule can help patients and physicians recognize melanoma:

- A Asymmetry, or an irregular shape of a mole
- B Borders that are irregular
- C Color within the mole that is variable or very dark
- D Diameter greater than 6 mm
- E Evolving over time

Be sure to check the palms of hands and feet, finger nails, toe nails and behind the ears. A mole that increases in size, changes shape or color, itches or bleeds also is suspicious. **Know your skin.** Be aware of any changes as noted above and any areas of dry patchy skin or sores that don't heal.

Although skin cancer is more common in Caucasians, everyone is at risk regardless of skin color. Dark-skinned individuals should remain diligent as many are diagnosed at a later stage. Therefore, skin inspection is just as important for these individuals.

What can I do to reduce my risk of skin cancer?

- Learn to identify and diagnose melanoma as early as possible
- Reduce and limit ultraviolet (UV) exposure from natural sunlight and artificial sources (tanning beds)
- Schedule a yearly skin exam by a dermatologist
- Do a monthly skin self-examination; research has shown that individuals, not doctors, are most likely to spot melanoma
- Generously apply sunscreen to all exposed skin approximately 15 minutes before sun exposure; reapply every two hours and after swimming or sweating
- Wear protective clothing whenever possible like a wide-brim hat, sunglasses, long-sleeved pants and shirts
- Seek shade when possible
- Do not get sunburned
- Avoid intentional tanning and indoor tanning beds
- Get plenty of Vitamin D, through a healthy diet and/or vitamin supplements (if recommended by your doctor)

For more information, visit the Melanoma Research Foundation's comprehensive site:
<http://www.melanoma.org/understand-melanoma/diagnosing-melanoma/detection-screening/abcdes-melanoma>